

Brawn supplants amateur credentials

The only similarity today between the world of professional wrestling and the sport of amateur wrestling is the word "wrestling."

But it wasn't that many years ago when it seemed almost a prerequisite for a world champion in pro wrestling to have a strong amateur background.

The reason, more than any other, is that pro wrestling used to be controlled at the promotional end by ex-wrestlers, many of whom were amateur champions. The feeling was that amateur credentials of its champions gave pro wrestling athletic credibility. And there was the belief in presenting someone as a world champion wrestler who was a legitimate top-echelon wrestler. But mainly they wanted to promote people like themselves to the top.

But today, the business is no longer controlled by ex-wrestlers. Only Verne Gagne — who won two NCAA titles and held the American Wrestling Association version of the world title nine times — of the floundering AWA remains as an ex-amateur champ running a wrestling company.

And the upper echelon of wrestlers has changed from those with sports backgrounds, whether it be amateur wrestling, judo or college football, to bodybuilders.

Truthfully, from a business standpoint, the change has paid off. From a human standpoint, the change can be debated. The emphasis on big bodybuilders has caused steroid usage to reach alarming proportions.

But even today, there are pro wrestlers with strong amateur backgrounds. Probably the most successful amateur among today's full-time pros is Brad Rheingans, who wrestles for the Minneapolis-based AWA and in Japan. Rheingans, 36, captured five AAU Greco-Roman national titles (1976-80) at 220 pounds, was a Greco-Roman gold medalist in the 1975 and 1979 Pan American Games, won the 1976 World Cup, and placed fourth in the Olympics that year.



**GRUNT
AND
GRIN**

BY DAVE MELTZER
FOR THE NATIONAL

ETC: Roddy Piper is scheduled to start this weekend as color commentator on the WWF's Superstars of Wrestling show. Piper replaces Jesse Ventura, who quit over a contract dispute last month. ... Shawn Michaels of the Rockers tag team blew out his knee last week and isn't expected back until Summer Slam. ... Davey Boy Smith is negotiating a return to the WWF this fall. ... Expect the rivalry between the WWF and NWA to heat up this fall. The WWF scheduled a show on Oct. 27 in Chicago after the NWA had announced its next pay-per-view show for the same day in the same city. ... What may be the largest wrestling fan convention takes place Aug. 24-27 at the Royce Hotel across from New York's LaGuardia Airport. The convention includes bus trips to Summer Slam in Philadelphia and the NWA show Aug. 24 at the Meadowlands Arena, plus live appearances by NWA world champion Sting, wrestling legends Bruno Sammartino, Terry Funk and Ricky Steamboat and former WWF star Big John Studd.

Chad
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—Lex